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Mr. Ferguson ✓

From: EUR - Mr. Hornbright

Subject: US-UK Relations in the Near East

Attached is a copy of a paper on the subject of "US-UK Relations in the Near East" which Hayden Raynor had Garner Ranney prepare at the time he left. Garner has worked on the British aspect of the Near East questions in NEA for several years and this paper reflects this experience.

It is our feeling that the analysis is sound and the conclusions valid.

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US-UK RELATIONS IN THE NEAR EAST

In recent months the Near East has assumed increasing importance as an area of Anglo-American differences. Although there is general agreement on our common objectives for that part of the world, the United States and the United Kingdom seem to be diverging more and more as to the policies and tactics best suited to attain these objectives. The two Governments have been in close and constant consultation on the problems of the area; they have frequently affirmed their identity of views in formal conversations in London and Washington; they have, on at least two occasions, despatched circular instructions to their representatives in the Near East calling for complete cooperation between British and American missions, even to the extent of urging such cooperation upon their respective business communities; and yet disagreements and suspicions on both sides have been on the increase in this area of our relations and an attitude of rivalry and resentment may, if not checked, grow up between them. A much greater degree of genuine understanding and cooperation is necessary if we are to avoid serious friction in US-UK relations and a conflict of policies which would be inimical to the best interests of both countries.

It may be assumed that the Governments of the United States and the United Kingdom are sincere in their professions that they share the same general objectives for the area. The stability, defense and development of the Near East are essential alike to American and British interests. The loss of the area, whether by internal disintegration or by external aggression, would deal a tremendous and possibly decisive blow to our global strategic position, would greatly weaken our worldwide prestige and influence, and would have economic and financial repercussions of the gravest consequence to the Western allies. Viewed in this light our interests are clearly identical, the basis for a common policy is clear, and the need for concerted action is imperative.

The British position in the Near East is admittedly much weaker than it used to be. Anti-British sentiment has been on the increase in practically every country, popular agitation has become more violent, and the foundations of

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British power have been gradually undermined. Comparing the past, when most of the area was a British sphere of influence, with this present, it is easy to underestimate the role which Great Britain continues to play in Near Eastern affairs. In spite of surface difficulties and real weaknesses, the British are still intimately concerned with the life of every one of these countries, they still have important influence behind the scenes, and they retain valuable bases of real power. Unpopularity does not necessarily connote weakness or lack of influence. The British traditionally forego the luxury of the former for the concrete yields of the latter. Their position in Jordan, Iraq, Cyprus, Aden, and the smaller, oil-rich, sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf remains one of very considerable importance, which we would be ill-advised to underrate. It gives them a voice and consequence in all the daily affairs of the region.

In other areas also, in Turkey, a military ally; in Greece, a traditional friend; and in Israel, where relations are improving, the United Kingdom has a degree of influence and a number of friends not to be estimated by newspaper articles or the occasional, inevitable, irritations of international intercourse. On the periphery of the Near East, as we think of it, are additional and important bases of British power which indirectly have their influence. To the east are the new dominions of the subcontinent of India; to the south the Sudan, friendly Ethiopia and the African colonies; to the west Libya, soon to be a strategically valuable and close ally. Moreover, the responsibility which the British now bear for the defense of the Near East, so long as it remains in force by our agreement, must entitle them to a special role in its affairs and such support as we can render in fulfilling their obligations.

While the British are under some popular attack, as in Iran, they nevertheless retain military facilities in many areas which are of great current importance to the defense of the entire Near East and a reality to be reckoned with by their opponents. In many cases these facilities, if once lost, could probably not be regained either by the United Kingdom or by this country. Even where their position appears to have been seriously weakened, as in Egypt, the British have a residue of influence (demonstrated, for instance, by their relations with the King and the manner in which they have been able to work behind the scenes in prolonging the present negotiations) which might be used

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to great effect if existing disputes could be settled. We have seen, as in India, how close a connection the British can retain with oriental peoples, even their erst-while bitterest enemies, once relations have been regularized on a sound basis. A solution of the Egyptian difficulties may well be the key to many of our problems in the Near East.

Whatever one may think of the long-range prospects of the British in the Near East, it is clear that at present they are playing a vital part there. Most observers agree that the region is virtually a power-vacuum, in which British influence is one of the few elements making for stability and peace. Were the British to withdraw tomorrow, or to be forced out or even to fade away, a void would be created which some other great power, ourselves or Russia, would have to fill. The weakness, incapacity and corruption of the local governments are bad enough as it is; without outside political guidance, economic assistance and military support they would bring on inevitable conflict, collapse and anarchy.

If we were prepared to fill this void and shoulder this burden, then we might logically, if not wisely, contemplate policies and practices which would weaken the British position in the Near East. If not, we are obliged by the realities of the situation to support the British position and to find realistic, even if not ideal, policies which will serve our common interests. We are obliged to do this for the good of the area itself, which would be the first to suffer by the diminution of any stabilizing influence, as well as for our own economic and strategic welfare. When the United States is carrying so large a share of the burden of supporting and arming the Western world, when our resources are likely to be taxed to the utmost to maintain this burden throughout the years to come, it is practical common sense to leave here and there areas for which we do not assume primary responsibility, in which our allies can make their important contribution. Foremost of these should be the Near East, where the British, by virtue of their long association with its people and problems, their preponderant economic and strategic interests, and their bases of real power, are, in spite of many faults, the best equipped to do the job. The British are far from finished in that region and they can be invaluable allies in the pursuit of our own political objectives.

Such an Anglo-American partnership in the Near East can
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only be achieved and maintained by a spirit of understanding, confidence and compromise on both sides. The nations of the area are quick to exploit the least sign of any division between us. They are equally prone to imagine differences where none exist and to embark on dangerous courses in the hope that the United States will take their part against the British. Nothing would suit them better than to play off the great powers against each other, thus extracting the maximum of concessions from both and giving the minimum of cooperation in return.

There can be no doubt that a much more fundamental understanding must be reached than heretofore between the United States and the United Kingdom. Agreement on general objectives, the pattern of some of our earlier conversations, is now of less importance than precise agreement on the methods to be followed in dealing with the concrete issues of the moment, for it must be borne in mind that we remain bound by the undertakings exchanged in numerous conversations with the British to coordinate our general policies and actions in the Near East. British policy in this region is tending to combine rigidity and uncertainty. Should a Conservative Government be returned to power, our difficulties with the United Kingdom would probably be further multiplied. The United States could not possibly support adventures such as that recently proposed by Eden for the forcing of the Suez Canal. It is a hopeful sign, however, that in a speech in the House of Commons on August 6th, Churchill took as his premise that the indispensable condition of a successful Near Eastern policy is that it should be an Anglo-American policy. In spite of this, the Tories may be expected to be much less responsive to our ideas of a "soft" policy, as opposed to a "tough" one, than are the Laborites, and they show even less concern with the danger that the forceful action for which they clamor might lead to grave difficulties within the United Nations, or even disturb the peace of the world. In such a situation our policy must be clear and unequivocal, standing on some middle ground which has a chance of acceptance by most of the parties concerned, and accommodating itself to the realities of domestic British politics insofar as possible.

We must be prepared in future to offer the British more constructive suggestions, and less pious preachments, regarding Near Eastern affairs, and we must be willing to make certain sacrifices, even of our own popularity in the

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ea, in the broader interest of Anglo-American solidarity. There may be occasions when some of our own policies and programs must be subordinated to this requirement. For example, we should be prepared to modify, or even to abandon, programs such as that proposed in NSC 47/5, if we find that they lead to serious friction with the British or increase rivalries and intrigues in Near Eastern countries. Such concessions, on both sides, are part of the price we have to pay for a continued partnership.

Differing estimates of the situation in the Near East are responsible for many instances in which difficulties arise with the United Kingdom. The British are generally inclined to ride out such storms as arise, treating them as temporary crises, to be met by the time-honored methods of firmness, political manipulation and diplomatic pressure. These methods, while sometimes harsh and unpalatable, have a function in international affairs which cannot be forgotten, especially when dealing with corrupt and decadent regimes. They are frequently more appropriate to the situation in the Near East than some of us are prepared to admit.

The United States rightly believes, however, that the awakening nationalism of the Near East requires a new approach to its problems, an accommodation of Western policies to new conditions and friendly assistance in the fulfillment of national aspirations. We should, however, be on guard against overemploying nationalism and not be duped by facades constructed in its name by corrupt leaders seeking a "whipping boy", usually the British, to cover up their own shortcomings. Additionally, we must be alert to spot for what they are phoney movements engendered or prostituted by Soviet agents. The British, for their part, feel that the increasing role of the United States in the area, and the altruism, inexperience and idealism of the United States in dealings with these countries, are tending to undermine their position and encourage ever increasing demands from irresponsible Near Eastern governments. They think we are all too free with easy advice; too ready to urge concessions upon them when their interests, rather than ours, are at stake; and inclined to be vacillating and alarmist at the first sign of trouble. Agreement on a realistic estimate of the situation in the Near East would go far to remove some of the causes of friction between us.

The mercurial nature of many of our own attitudes and policies toward the Near East should indeed be a matter of

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real concern. Every passing agitation against the British in one or more of the Near Eastern countries is reflected by a similar wave of apprehension or annoyance in Washington. The British have not built up nor maintained their world position by indulgence in any race for popularity. Some of our people are inclined to mistake surface and transient difficulties for the settled reality of a situation, and to measure Britain's power and influence largely in terms of the fan mail or brickbats which the British may receive.

There is need for a high-level determination that we will ride out such squalls as arise, for arise they must in the natural course of affairs between nations, in firm and full partnership with the United Kingdom. If we are prepared to do this, and to be completely frank in the exchange of our views and information, then we shall be in a strong position to urge those modifications and rectifications of British policy which are undoubtedly essential. Our estimate of the situation in the Near East seems to be a truer one than theirs, and they may be obliged to give way more than we do, but all the right is not on either side and a firmer attitude toward Near Eastern nations, in cooperation with the United Kingdom, will both win their respect and help greatly to stabilize the situation.

We have spoken so far of the need for Anglo-American harmony largely in terms of the Near East itself. Our relations in that area are but a segment, though an important one, of the overall pattern of our international relations. Strong as are the local reasons for preserving a united front in the Near East, they become overwhelming when viewed from the standpoint of our global interests. The United Kingdom is our strongest and most important ally. It is still the leader of the Commonwealth; the center of a world-wide system of interlocking political, economic and strategic interests; the most stable and dependable power in Europe. In the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as elsewhere, the United Kingdom carries more weight than any other single friendly power and we call upon it for assistance and support in almost every major issue. If we differ on any fundamental point of international policy the adverse results of that division are felt with cumulative effect in every other country concerned and in every related field of endeavor. If the area of our frictions is great, so is the area of our common interests. Anything which tends to divide us weakens us both.

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Anything which weakens the United Kingdom reduces also the strength of the United States abroad and increases the burdens which we must bear alone.

In so vast and complex a pattern of international relations the areas of difficulty are inevitably great. They must constantly be reduced and harmonized as much as possible if we are to maintain our essential partnership. Such support as we require constantly from the British, demands, by the nature of things, a quid pro quo from the United States.

In the Near East immediate British interests - expressed in terms of territorial possessions, military bases, formal alliances, economic investments and historical connections - are very much greater than those of the United States and are a vital source of Britain's existing political prestige, economic strength and military importance. These interests are part of the daily life of the British people and the welfare of their country. We must safeguard and respect them as far as possible, if we are not to endanger our alliance, which is of fundamental importance, and weaken our friends at a moment in history when we need them greatly.

If we take into account all these interests and then picture, as earlier in this paper, the Near East as surrounded on three sides by Britain's possessions, commonwealth partners and friendly allies, we have a better realization of the role of the Near East in the complex of Britain's worldwide interests. This emphasizes the concept, which the British have long held, of the Near East as vital to them because through it runs their "lifeline" to India, Australia and New Zealand. Although this concept is somewhat outmoded by the conditions of modern warfare and changes in the character of the Commonwealth itself, it still has some validity and plays a part in British thinking about the area. The British have traditionally been sensitive to any threat to their position in that part of the world, and habits of thought, as well as current economic and strategic needs, make them jealous to retain what they can of that position. The average Englishman is much more conscious of the Near East than the average American: his newspapers contain much more of its news; Parliament and party spokesmen frequently debate its problems; history has taught him to think of it in terms of his country's national interest. This popular attitude must be

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taken into account in our dealings with the United Kingdom on Near Eastern problems. It is a principal reason why our conduct in that area has such direct and intimate repercussions on Anglo-American relations as a whole. We cannot expect and will not long maintain the support of the British elsewhere if we desert them in this vital region; furthermore, we would be an accomplice in the further weakening of our most dependable ally.

Should we reach a serious crisis with the British over Near Eastern affairs, we would run grave dangers of jeopardizing our western alliance which is of overriding importance and presumably would take precedence over our relations with the several Near Eastern States, important as they may be. Fortunately, there seems little likelihood that matters will reach such a pass between the United States and the United Kingdom. On the contrary we may hope in the forthcoming conversations to achieve a degree of closer understanding and increased co-operation, based upon our mutual and compelling interests and which can be a source of strength to both countries and a benefit to the Near East as a whole.

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